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ABSTRACT

This issue of "Linkages" addresses skills that literacy programs can include in their curriculum to teach self-advocacy to adult learners with learning disabilities. Articles include: "Consumers Empowering Consumers" (Noel Gregg and Cheri Hoy); "Self-Advocacy: Practical Advice to the Adult with LD" (Pat Boyd); "Disclosure: It's a Matter of Choice" (Winnelle D. Carpenter); "Accommodations: Just What Is Reasonable?" (Linda Andreson); "Support, Care, and Accommodations: David Cameron's Story" (Kathy Martin); "Tips for Self-Advocacy in the Workplace" (Dale S. Brown); and "Learning through Accommodations" (Cindy Knight). The final article, "Self-Advocacy in Educational Settings" (Lydia Block), discusses the need to document a disability and identify the office that serves students with disabilities. Tips are provided to help students negotiate with professionals to get the academic support and accommodations they need, including: understanding your learning disability well enough to describe it; being able to explain how a specific accommodation will help you; explaining that an accommodation helps you accomplish the same tasks as your peers; and talking to learning disabilities or special education professional if you are working with someone who is reluctant to provide you with what you need. The newsletter includes a list of resources for individuals with learning disabilities. (CR)

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NATIONAL ADULT LITERACY AND LEARNING DISABILITIES CENTER

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FROM THE DIRECTOR . . .

This issue of *LINKAGES* deals with self-advocacy--a critical issue for adults with learning disabilities (LD) as well as for literacy education programs which provide services to these adults. Self-advocacy means speaking out on one's own behalf. The ability to self-advocate is mentioned again and again in the literature on learning disabilities as a key factor contributing to, and even predicting, success at work and in school. Persons who have learning disabilities and who need specific accommodations to ensure their success in educational and work settings must be able to state their needs to teachers and employers.

Persons with LD, however, may have difficulty in effectively advocating for themselves. Many have a history of being passive learners with inefficient study skills and a lack of facility in monitoring their own learning. Many have been poor goal setters, often resisting asking questions, making choices, and taking risks. Some lack a strong locus of control, and others struggle on a daily basis with poor self-concept and limited social skills. Such behaviors are not consistent with skills required for effective personal advocacy.

Literacy education programs can help empower their students with LD to advocate for their needs in a direct, persuasive manner. This newsletter addresses self-advocacy skills that literacy programs can include in their curriculum to teach individuals with LD to (1) identify their strengths and weaknesses along with potential compensatory strategies; (2) understand oneself as a learner; (3) set goals and monitor progress toward these goals; and (4) practice techniques for effective communication. All these skills can be taught. More importantly, the acquisition of these skills ultimately leads to the empowerment of adults with LD, promoting success in their roles as workers, learners, family members, and citizens.

- Mary Ann Corley, Ph.D.

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SELF-ADVOCACY: EMPOWERMENT FOR ADULT LEARNERS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

CONSUMERS EMPOWERING CONSUMERS

by Noel Gregg, Ph.D., and Cheri Hoy, Ph.D.

A great deal of attention has been devoted to understanding and improving the transition of young adults with learning disabilities (LD) from high school to adult life. Despite such attention, relatively limited information is available to describe and explain the impact of LD on personal and career choices. A critical component of success is the ability of consumers (persons with LD) to express their own service needs, to be self-advocates. Self-advocacy strategies can help adults with LD become more aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, as well as the requirements for educational or job success. Indications suggest that an individual's ability to self-advocate may be a powerful influence on personal and career processes and success.

The issue of success, as well as the risk and resilience of the adult population with LD, has been a recent interest of professionals (Spekman, Goldberg & Herman, 1993; Reiff, Gerber & Ginsberg, 1993). In a review of this literature, Hoy and Manglitz (1996) suggest, "Many of the characteristics of successful adults and the protective factors associated with the risk and resilience literature are virtually identical, including self-awareness, the proactive orientation of these adults, and the ability and decision to use family support systems and mentors."

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The Learning Disabilities Research and Training Center (LDRTC), located at The University of Georgia, has conducted three years of research and training, funded through the National Institute for Disability Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR), designed to investigate the impact of self-advocacy training led by consumers on individual empowerment. This Consumer Empowerment Training was drawn from concepts associated with collaboration models and the self-help movement.

The self-help movement stresses that individuals with challenges are not isolated in their experiences. By sharing experiences and supporting members in taking action to solve problems, participants can break cycles of dependency which can be limiting. However, the essentialist exclusion of the 'insider-outsider' attitude found in some self-help groups can be detrimental to the goal of removing barriers (Gregg & Phillips, 1996). This potential difficulty was addressed in the development of Consumer Empowerment Training by pairing a consumer and a service provider in delivering the training sessions.

The consumer and service provider team provide two sessions of approximately three hours each. Core areas of emphasis include:

- awareness of strengths and weaknesses;
- awareness of vocational goals and support services to obtain those goals;
- knowledge of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and consumer rights within the school or workplace;
- strategies to obtain appropriate work for a consumer's ability through proper interviewing and disclosure skills;
- knowledge of appropriate accommodations and modifications possible in the school or workplace; and
- maintaining employment through conflict avoidance and resolution skills coupled with stress reduction strategies.

Numerous activities are used to address these areas, including modeling, role playing, lecturing, group discussion, video presentations, graphic displays, journal writing, group activities, and interactive feedback. The goal of this self-advocacy training is to have consumers who have become empowered turn around and assume the role of the empowerer.

The LDRTC has, as a culmination to three years of research and training, developed a training package designed to qualify consumers around the country to disseminate Consumer Empowerment Training. The package consists of a training manual that details every section of Consumer Empowerment Training and gives complete guidelines for getting started, helpful dialogue suggestions for the trainers to ensure smooth flow from section to section, and a video which accompanies the training manual.

An individual's ability to self-advocate may be a powerful influence on personal and career processes and success.

Literacy providers can be instrumental in the successful self-empowerment of adults with LD. A large percentage of those individuals served at literacy centers are reported to have LD, most likely one that has been undiagnosed. Therefore, the literacy provider becomes the catalyst for encouraging self-advocacy strategies and goals for the adults with LD. The time has come to put knowledge, research, and theory about adults with LD into what Hooks (1994) calls a "holistic framework of liberatory activism."

It became evident from the voices of the adults throughout the Consumer Empowerment Training that service providers are challenged to question the practice of focusing on academic skills, perhaps to the detriment of the self-advocacy strategies needed by adults with LD. *It is difficult for us as service providers to look at long-term issues* because so much of our time is given to helping adults reach their *short-term* goals: getting an accommodation, passing the GED Tests,

getting a job. It also is difficult for us to grapple with the internal world of individuals with LD as they negotiate their lives. What is meant by self-advocacy and self-reflection? How difficult is it to witness and really listen to pain without minimizing, trivializing, or over-intellectualizing (Gregg & Ferri, 1996)? What can a literacy provider do to encourage self-advocacy for adults with LD? A few suggestions identified from the Consumer Empowerment Training research include:

- **Listen:** Provide time in a busy and hectic world to listen to the stories of the adult with LD. Shakespeare (1995) notes that, "having the space to tell them [stories], and an audience which will listen . . . All starts with having a voice." Remember that, to engage in active dialogue, one also must listen carefully to gaps, silences, or even contradictions (Chase, 1992).

- **See through the masks:** Many adults with LD have worn masks for so many years that they question their own authenticity. These masks are the attempt to cover painful feelings of fear, obsessive thoughts, lack of self-confidence, self-doubt, and extreme self-criticism.

The goal of this self-advocacy training is to have consumers who have become empowered turn around and assume the role of the empowerer.

- **Find a realistic balance:** Some adults with learning disabilities often perceive weaknesses as minor inconveniences rather than deficits. Other adults cannot see any strengths because of an overfocus on weaknesses. Literacy providers can help adults with LD find a realistic balance. Adults with LD require accommodations and modifications. They should be encouraged to use appropriate modifications for their learning profile, not to assume all modifications are due them because they have a disability. Similarly, literacy providers can help adults who are overfocused on weaknesses identify and start using strengths.

- **Learn from other voices:** Two very important points have emerged from the training and research. The first is that adults with LD have discovered many useful coping strategies; sharing these strategies and listening to strategies others have used successfully empower both parties. Another important point which has emerged is the need for adults with LD to try to better understand the perspective of their service providers. At times, service providers cannot respond to consumers for a variety of legitimate reasons. Service providers must then make an effort to communicate honestly with consumers about the reason for their delay in responding to situations. Consumers and service providers must work together as a team, being both open and honest so that available options to solve situations can be identified and put into action.

- **Learn about resources:** Literacy providers can work with adults in developing lists of local resources and procedures for accessing them. Ultimately, such lists of resources can be updated by adults with LD, providing further opportunities for empowerment.

- **Support the formation of self-help groups:** After adults have gone through Consumer Empowerment Training, literacy providers can encourage them to continue meeting and supporting one another. For some groups, verbal encouragement may be all that is needed. Other groups may need guidance in locating a meeting place, setting a time, or publicizing the meeting. Literacy providers can consult with the group on these issues until the group is self-sustaining.

For more information concerning The University of Georgia Consumer Empowerment Training, optional training programs, or the results of the research conducted by LDRTC, call (706) 542-4597.

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The National ALLD Center Homepage

The National ALLD Center now has a homepage on the National Institute for Literacy's LINCS WWW site at:

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What you'll find:

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- **Postings from the NIFL-ALLD Listserv**
- **Stories from students as told to Archie Willard**
- **Links to Other LD Resources**

Self-Advocacy: Practical Advice to the Adult with LD

By Pat Boyd

As an adult with specific learning disabilities (LD) and director of a national organization committed to the management of LD and attention disorders in adults, I am profoundly aware of the need for individuals to master the "art of self-advocacy." Far too often, newly diagnosed adults are in awe of the professional who has provided their diagnosis. For adults who were diagnosed as children, the LD label often is perceived as the cause of their school-related misery and as an issue belonging to the parent/advocate. When the issue of LD needs to be addressed, neither the professional nor the parent is the appropriate representative in the adult world. Each individual with LD must learn to be his/her own representative.

To be an effective self-advocate requires a high level of knowledge about yourself in any situation. For example, Mark wants to buy a new car; he needs to know in advance the features he wants and the price he can afford. If Mark knows what his financial limits are and how much he values each feature, he can negotiate a purchase with the confidence that he has made the best possible deal for himself. On the other hand, if Mark is not clear about his own needs and desires, the car dealer will likely control the outcome of the sale.

Anyone can become a self-advocate; in fact, most of us already are self-advocates. Success comes from knowing yourself so well that there is no doubt regarding your likes and dislikes, your strengths and your weaknesses. You know whether you enjoy eating cabbage, and you have no problem with your response when cabbage is offered to you. You know the type of movies you like, the clothes you're most comfortable in, and the lifestyle you enjoy. Exercising these preferences as an adult is common and therefore acceptable to the general public.

Issues related to LD are not commonly understood by the general public, but they are common to those of us who have LD. I have such a hard time spelling the words I use in speaking that I avoid handwriting anything. If I am forced to write by hand, I must limit myself to words I can spell correctly or carry an electronic speller to avoid the embarrassment of juvenile grammar or bizarre spelling. I prefer to rely on greeting cards and my computer for printed messages. I know my limitations with spelling, and I know my shame. I also know a variety of strategies and accommodations I can use to reduce the appearance of the limitations and enhance my strengths with the use of words.

Remember that specific learning disabilities make up a category of disabilities with various limitations depending on the individual. A qualified professional can look at your test scores and determine your areas of strengths and weaknesses. But to tell anyone in the general public, "I have learning disabilities, dyslexia, central auditory processing deficits, or attention deficit disorders" tells the listener nothing about how this affects you. You are truly the expert on the effects of LD for you.

Signs of Trouble

When you try to read . . .

- do the words appear distorted?
- do you read the words and not know the content?
- can you figure out the words and content, but it takes you a long time?
- is your handwriting very large or very small?
- do you scribble words?
- do you have trouble distinguishing between a lower case "b" or "d" when writing?

When you are with other people . . .

- do you have trouble hearing what people say?
- do you not "get" jokes?
- do you have trouble hearing the syllables when asked to sound out a word?
- are you distracted in a lecture, seminar, or meeting?

- do you have trouble recalling a specific word or phrase?
- do the words get jumbled in your mouth or mind when you try to speak?
- do you have difficulty expressing yourself in a group or do you recall a response an hour or more after it was needed?

When working with math . . .

- do you have trouble writing the number?
- do you have trouble with simple calculations?
- even when given a calculator, do you have trouble with the mathematical concepts?

Take the time to identify your specific problem in words that the general public can understand. Then also identify the specific strategies that help you attend to the task at hand.

Strategies That Work

You may find that you learn more easily when another person shows or tells you what to do than when you read the instructions. You might highlight the printed instructions or rewrite them in your own shorthand. You might use a tape recorder so that you have a record and refresher of the verbal instructions. For some people, graphs, charts, and/or pictures truly are worth a thousand words. If you work best at home, you may consider telecommuting. You may handle multiple tasks well, or you may prefer to focus on one thing at a time. You may use an appointment calendar and answering machine to control interruptions. Computers and calculators are common tools in the workplace; even electronic spell checkers are acceptable. Take the time to identify strategies and solutions that minimize your weak areas in words that the general public can understand. Respect and capitalize on your comfort zones.

Although we are profoundly aware of our limitations, our assets are more important to the boss.

Face the fact that you must be able to use the word "disabled" if you want the right to an accommodation. While you may feel that you have only a "difference," the laws that protect your right to accommodations at work and on campus are "Disability Rights Laws." These laws were passed to allow *individuals who have a disability* the right to be productive using their own methods.

Both the individual with a disability and the entity covered under the law have rights. The employer and educational institution have the right to set standards. Individuals with disabilities have the responsibility to be qualified to meet the established standards. They also have the right to use strategies and aids to accommodate for the effects of their disabilities. Know what the standards are and how you can qualify to meet those standards.

When you can say, "I have a disability," and you can briefly define the immediate problem and solution in words that are familiar to the general public, you are ready to be a successful self-advocate in disability-related situations. You are prepared with skills to request and receive accommodations on an LD issue. Do not tax your listener by trying to define the broad spectrum of learning disabilities in general; stick to the immediate issue that you are facing at the time. In the beginning, limit your statement to, "I have a disability." You may or may not be asked to provide documentation of the specific disability.

Keep in mind that your needs might be met without identifying your disability in an employment situation, because employers are concerned with productivity. Therefore, you may be able to get what you need by saying, "I can be more productive if ___." Fill in the blank with your needs, such as, ". . . if we moved my desk to an area with less traffic," or ". . . if I had some clerical help for an hour each week." Although we are profoundly aware of our limitations, our assets are more important to the boss. Most employers are willing to invest effort and money to enhance an

employee's productivity. After all, you were hired for your skills and talents.

Cooperation and effective communication are vital elements in maintaining a relationship and achieving your goals. While you are not required to disclose your disability, it is in your best interest to disclose when you have exercised all other options and before you are faced with termination. This can be tricky in that many of us have trouble recognizing that our positions are at risk. Pay attention to periodic performance reviews. Then monitor your attitude. ***How*** you communicate can say more than ***what*** you communicate.

> ***An assertive person shows confidence that is rarely challenged, while an aggressive person provokes anger that will be fought or avoided.***

When you know your qualifications, limitations, rights, and responsibilities, you can express your request to have your needs met with a positive statement plus an attitude of cooperation. It is extremely important to monitor your attitude. **An assertive person shows confidence that is rarely challenged, while an aggressive person provokes anger that will be fought or avoided.** With no effort or emphasis, you will be assertive when you are confident that you are qualified and entitled to have your needs met. A successful self-advocate is, in fact, a person who can advocate in a manner that promotes his/her ability to get the job done, whether at home, at school, or in the workplace.

Pat Boyd is Executive Director of The Rebus Institute in Burlingame, CA, a national organization committed to the study and dissemination of information on adult issues related to learning disabilities and attention deficit disorders.

Sue Macus, Program Coordinator for The Rebus Institute's "Empowerment through Self-Advocacy" Program, contributed to this article.

Assertiveness Is. . .
Assertiveness Is Not. . .

Assertiveness is. . .

- *expressing your needs clearly and directly.*
- *expressing your ideas without feeling guilt or intimidated.*
- *sticking up for what you believe you need--even though professionals may not agree.*
- *knowing your rights and how to get them.*
- *documenting what you need and all facts pertaining to your case.*
- *effective communication.*
- *conveying your feelings of self-confidence when you communicate with others.*
- *self-reliance and independence.*
- *analyzing a problem and pinpointing the area of responsibility before you act.*
- *having a positive attitude at all times.*

Assertiveness is not. . .

- *beating around the bush before stating your needs.*
- *feeling too guilty or afraid to express your needs.*
- *ignorance about your rights.*
- *ineffective communications.*
- *abdicating to others your right to self-advocate.*
- *acting precipitously before you get all the facts.*
- *giving in to defeat.*

The National ALLD Center extends its appreciation to the Family Resource Center on Disabilities in Chicago, Illinois, for permission to reprint a portion of the "Assertiveness Is . . ., Assertiveness Is Not . . ." article from the publication, "How to Get Services by Being Assertive" (1993).

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Disclosure: It's a Matter of Choice!

By Winnelle Carpenter, M.A.

Deciding to disclose a learning disability is a personal, individual decision. There is extreme anxiety in telling a teacher, employer, or friend about a learning disability because the individual fears that disclosure may place him/her in a vulnerable position. Although sensitivity and awareness have increased over the years, individuals with learning disabilities still feel a sense of anxiety and must exercise caution in deciding to whom they disclose because it is still common to be:

- misunderstood;
- placed under suspicion (Because a learning disability is not a visible disability, many persons hear, "If you'd just try harder. . .");
- humiliated;
- perceived as less than equal;
- labeled a troublemaker;
- alienated;
- isolated; and/or
- stigmatized.

Dale Brown, an adult with a learning disability, has taught others about learning disabilities for 20 years. In the following excerpt from an article she wrote for *LDA Newsbriefs* (Vol. 24, No. 1, Jan. 1989), she presents a rationale that encourages individuals to disclose.

> *Many people with learning disabilities declare proudly, "I'm not learning disabled, I learn differently." This seems to cast off the negative stereotypes that can go with the label of learning disabilities. We are not denying the disability; we are only denying the* ***incorrect beliefs*** *that sometimes accompany the label.*
>
> *I believe that being considered "disabled" helps us to receive reasonable accommodations and help from others. Everyone is different and everyone learns differently. But, generally speaking, most people, without learning disabilities, do not* ***REQUIRE*** *the accommodations we request. A person with a disability may have needs requiring time and effort from other people or funds from society. For this reason, the concept of disability is crucial. If I have a learning "problem," why can't I solve it? If I have a learning difference, why am I asking for extra time and attention or for changes in the rules that "must be followed"? The concept of a disability is more important for people with learning disabilities than for people with other disabilities, because so many of the accommodations they need are also desired by others.*

Many people with learning disabilities choose not to disclose but refer to themselves in other ways, such as:

- learning abled;
- learning different;
- different learner;
- unique learner;
- learning disAbilities;
- differently abled; and/or
- disabled.

If a student makes academic accommodation requests (time extensions, modified tests) to a college professor on the basis of being "learning different," his/her request may not be honored. If the same student makes academic accommodation requests because of a ***learning disability*** (verified through appropriate officials), the request must be honored under law (Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act, 1973, P.L. 93-112). The same holds true in the workplace.

If an individual chooses not to identify him- or herself as having a learning disability, he/she cannot expect to receive accommodations. Yet individuals also can experience abuse as a result of disclosure (there is potential to be treated differently, to be the target of lower expectations, or to face fewer chances for advancement). It is not always easy to know whom to tell, how much, and when. Literacy teachers, administrators, and advocates for persons with LD may

find the following suggestions helpful in encouraging adults to disclose when appropriate.

Suggestions to the Adult with LD Regarding Disclosure

1. **Become the expert.** Increase your knowledge about learning disabilities. **Practice and rehearse** stating your specific learning disability, listing the important accommodations you will need to learn and perform successfully both in school and on the job. Self-advocates choose to become responsible for educating themselves. You cannot successfully advocate if you do not know what is interfering with your learning or job performance. Educate yourself and *build* confidence. Confidence encourages risk-taking, which will enable you to educate others.

2. **Know your *strengths* as well as your *challenges* and practice verbalizing them.** Can you read well, take notes, or follow multiple complex directions? Do you have difficulty listening, writing, or doing simple math? Knowledge of your specific abilities will help you to successfully communicate your strengths and minimize your challenges when you decide to disclose your disability.

3. **Disclose only what is necessary to those who need to hear it.** State what you need to be successful at a task (not why you can't do it) in a *positive, assertive* way.

4. **Collect articles, books, handouts, and pamphlets on learning disabilities.** Handouts give credibility to what you are saying and, because the information is provided in written form, can be left with others.

5. **Use your resources.** You may need to ask for assistance. Recently, a woman had a colleague accompany her while she disclosed her learning disability and made a request for accommodations. The colleague, who had already received workplace accommodations for a similar learning disability, was able to give practical information about how the supervisor could provide accommodative services without reducing work expectations.

If an individual chooses not to identify him- or herself as having a learning disability, he/she cannot expect to receive accommodations.

6. **Know your rights!**
The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (P.L. 101-336) and **Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973** (P.L. 93-112) are civil rights laws that protect the rights of adults with disabilities in both educational and employment settings. With increased awareness of these laws, employers are becoming more willing to provide reasonable accommodations. Your disclosure of a learning disability cannot exclude you from any course, degree, or program. You are entitled to *academic accommodations.*

7. **Know when to disclose and to whom; share and discuss this topic with others with learning disabilities.** Continue to become your own expert. Practice expressing your own learning disability and needs. These activities build confidence and self esteem, and you will be well on the road to being your own best advocate.

Winnelle D. Carpenter, M.A., is an educational consultant who specializes in developing and implementing educational programs for children and adults with specific learning styles, learning disabilities, and ADD. She is both the researcher and author of the curriculum manual, ***"Become Your Own Expert!"*** *This article has been adapted from a section of that manual.*

Reasonable Accommodations: Just What Is Reasonable?

By Linda Andresen

Why is it that fear and misunderstanding often are the first reactions that some employers and educational service providers have when they are told that they are required by law to make reasonable accommodations for students and workers who have disabilities? In many cases, these reactions are the result of lack of knowledge about the laws and about the methods of providing accommodations. Potential costs involved in providing accommodations may be another source of apprehension.

First, let's examine the laws. Section 504 of the Re habilitation Act of 1973 (P.L. 93-112), states that, "No individual with a disability in the United States shall, solely by reason of his or her disability, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance or any program or activity conducted by an Executive agency." This includes educational agencies and school systems. More recent (1990) legislation, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (P.L. 101-336), requires that "No qualified individual with a disability shall, by reason of such disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of the services, programs, or activities of a public entity or be subjected to discrimination by any such entity."

These laws, which include people with learning disabilities as well as physical disabilities, primarily deal with two general areas of accommodation: facilities or structures, and the job or educational setting. The structural accommodations with which we are most familiar include ramps and elevators which allow barrier-free access to the facility. This should not be a problem in newly constructed facilities. In the educational setting or on the job, equipment, examinations, materials, and policies must be acquired or modified. Accommodations must be made unless

What are the rights and responsibilities of the institution?

The institution that enrolls an adult with a disability:

- is responsible for ensuring that the course and its contents are accessible;
- is responsible for making reasonable accommodations in the instructional methods and the evaluation system on a case by case basis; and
- is responsible for evaluating students solely on their abilities.

What are the rights and responsibilities of students with disabilities?

Students with disabilities:

- have the responsibility to identify themselves as needing accommodation(s) in a timely fashion;
- have the responsibility to request specific services;
- have the responsibility to demonstrate or provide documentation on how their disability affects a particular system, instructional method, or evaluation criterion;
- have the right to educational services without discrimination;
- have the right to be evaluated based on their abilities, not their disabilities;
- have the right to evaluation to ensure appropriate placement;
- have the right to get help both in class and during tests;
- have the right to an equal opportunity to learn;
- have the right to modifications or auxiliary aids if the location, delivery system, or instructional methodologies limit their access, participation, or ability to benefit;
- have the right to appeal the institution's decisions concerning accommodations; and
- have the same responsibility and obligation as any student to meet and maintain the institution's academic and technical standards.

the service provider can demonstrate that the accommodation would impose undue hardship on the institution. Conversely, it is the responsibility of the adult who desires accommodations to disclose his/her disability and provide appropriate documentation in order to request specific services in a timely fashion.

As for costs, sometimes just a little flexibility is all that is required. Besides those previously described, a number of very minor, inexpensive, and effective modifications and accommodations are available. In fact, the Job Accommodation Network reports that 70 percent of the job accommodations that they suggest cost less than $500. Several free or low-cost examples are simple rearrangement of equipment, extended time, tape recorders and headphones, color coding, highlighters, large print materials, magnifiers, index and cue cards, adjustable task lighting, handheld talking devices, books on tape, and tactile enhancers. Other more expensive accommodations have come with the advancement of computer technology, including CD-ROMs, special software, and speech recognition systems.

Accommodations should not be provided to those with disabilities simply because it is the law; they should be provided because it is the ethical and compassionate thing to do. The dictionary definition of reasonable is "not excessive or extreme; fair." It is only fair that literacy providers remove the hurdles which impede the progress of those with disabilities. By doing so, providers can help to empower adults with learning disabilities to increase their self-advocacy and reach their educational and employment goals.

Linda Andresen is West Virginia's ABE Professional Development Coordinator and a member of the National ALLD Center Advisory Board.

Reasonable accommodations that literacy programs must provide to persons with disabilities on a case by case basis include, but are not limited to, the following:

- making existing physical facilities readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities;
- restructuring a task;
- acquiring or modifying equipment and devices;
- modifying examinations, training materials, and policies; and
- providing qualified readers/interpreters and other similar modifications.

Examples of accommodations that educational programs may provide for students with learning disabilities on a case by case basis include, but are not limited to:

- extended time for completing assignments, taking tests, and other required activities;
- books on tape;
- reduced visual or auditory distractions;
- auxiliary aids and assistive technology, such as calculators, highlighters, computers;
- large-print materials;
- memory aids or cue cards;
- sound-suppression earphones or earplugs for auditory distractions;
- alternative format for instructions; and
- note-takers.

Shaded portions of this article are excerpts from the National ALLD Center's Tool Kit (in press).

The National ALLD Center thanks the following individuals for reviewing and contributing to this newsletter: Susan Green, Program Officer/Liaison, National Institute for Literacy; Ivan Charner, Vice President and Director, National Institute for Work and Learning, Academy for Educational Development; Bryna Shore Fraser, Deputy Director, National Institute for Work and Learning, Academy for Educational Development; Neil Sturomski, President, Sturomski & Associates; Patricia Anderson, Coordinator Connecticut Postsecondary Disability Technical Assistance Center at The University of Connecticut; David Fleischman, Assistant Director of Professional Services, National Center for Learning Disabilities; Sheldon Horowitz, Director of Professional Services, National Center for Learning Disabilities; and Arlyn Roffman, Professor of Special Education, Lesley College.

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Support, Care, and Accommodations: The David Cameron Story

By Kathy Martin

David Cameron is a family man, a fisherman, and a hard worker. He has excellent verbal skills and an above average IQ. David has one problem; he has a learning disability. But David says that to overcome anything, you need caring people: a supportive spouse, friends, and adult education teachers that care.

David's lifetime dream has always been to work for Georgia-Pacific. Four years ago, David approached Gary Beasley, the Georgia-Pacific Pulp and Paper Training Manager, about a job. Gary said that he could not hire David because he did not have adequate academic skills. David got a job at another company, but he kept thinking about the words that denied him his dream. Gary's refusal "lit a fire under" David to return to school and get his GED diploma.

David did not know he had a learning disability; he thought his educational troubles stemmed from his failure to apply himself in school. "At the time, I was embarrassed. I was scared because a lot of people didn't know that I couldn't read real good." When people on his job found out that he could not read, they sometimes made fun of him, which "really hurt." He found ways to cover up, such as asking a co-worker to check the work order to see what it called for.

Finally, David took the first and hardest step toward getting an education--admitting that he had a problem and asking for help. Judy Kirkley, Human Resource Manager at Bemis Bag, Inc., supported David by allowing him to work and to attend the Joint Efforts in Training (JET) Forest Echoes Technical Institute Workplace Education Program at the same time. Carolyn Hart, a JET instructor, arranged for David to be tested for learning disabilities and helped him to find strategies so that his visual perception problems would not interfere with his success in the workplace. Although Gary Beasley was not able to hire David at the time, he took a special interest in David's progress. Gary spoke with LD experts, gathered information on techniques to teach adults with learning disabilities, and shared them with David's instructors. David says, "It's like somebody pulled a load of bricks off my shoulders when I found out that I wasn't as dumb as everyone thought I was."

Getting accommodations for taking the GED Tests requires documentation of learning disabilities. David and his instructor went to work gathering the required information. The approved accommodations for David included reduced lighting, a private room, and extra time. With these accommodations, David passed his tests and received his GED diploma. Now some of the same people who had made fun of him before came up to him, shook his hand, and told him how proud they are of him for earning his GED. David says that the best part of his adult education experience is "to know that I've got something that nobody can ever take away from me."

> ***It's like somebody pulled a load of bricks off my shoulders when I found out that I wasn't as dumb as everyone thought I was.***

David's story doesn't end with getting his GED. He now is employed at Georgia Pacific, and he sees more education in his future.

Georgia Pacific is meeting David's needs for accommodations; little written information is given to David without a verbal explanation. David says, "It's still hard to tell some co-workers that I have a learning disability, because I'm embarrassed and afraid of being made fun of, but I just have to let it go and do my best to educate people about learning disabilities."

Kathy Martin is the JET Coordinator at Workplace Education Program in Forest Echoes Technical Institute in Crossett, Arkansas.

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Tips for Self-Advocacy in the Workplace

By Dale S. Brown

This article outlines and describes steps that adults with learning disabilities can take to become self-advocates and to request accommodations or services in the workplace.

Setting the Stage

1. **Be productive.** Bosses and co-workers are more likely to accede to accommodation requests from people who are perceived as high performers than from those who are not considered essential to the organizational mission. Of course, being productive is hard without reasonable accommodation! You can end up in a Catch 22 situation. But do your best.

2. **Market your work to your bosses and co-workers.** You need to be perceived as productive. This often is different from your actual productivity. Each organization has its own signals that show you are a hard worker. Common expectations include wearing clean, well-fitted clothes; arriving at work on time; staying at your desk; and keeping conversations with co-workers related to the job. Marketing your work to your supervisors may mean asking their advice, keeping them posted, writing memoranda, and representing yourself well with internal reports. For sales jobs, talk up your successful sales. Of course, you should not carry this too far and risk being considered a braggart.

3. **Be helpful.** When you are asked to do something, see it as an opportunity to serve. The more people who feel supported by you, the more likely they are to give you the support you need when you ask.

4. **Know your legal rights as a person with a disability.** Study the Americans with Disabilities Act (P.L. 101-336). The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (1-800-669-3362) has many free brochures about it. The best accommodations are those that are won without resorting to complaints and lawsuits. However, knowing that the law is on your side will give you tremendous confidence. If you are in a unionized workplace, meet your union steward or other union officials before you need them to represent you. In order to receive accommodation as your legal right, you must disclose your disability.

Making Your Request

5. **Study yourself doing your job. Determine where you need accommodation.** As part of that survey, see if there are things that can be done on your own. Consider:

- *your work space.* Can you find everything you need? Does it support your productivity?

- *how you communicate with others.* Does your supervisor insist on writing you notes and memos rather than talking to you? Is most of the print in documents you work with too small for you? Is the print on your computer screen too small for you? Your system manager may be able to quickly change your screen so that you can read more easily. Also, you may be able to persuade your employer to pay for tutoring or reading lessons if you think they would help you do a better job.

- *the tasks themselves.* Are there some tasks which are not that important to your job but are challenging to you because of your dyslexia? Many employees successfully have received help with reading through the use of clerical help, reading machines, and large print for internal memoranda. In other cases, reading tasks have been assigned to other employees. For example, in one team environment, team members rotate filling in the forms of a talented salesperson who is unable to complete them.

6. **Research the range of accommodation options and choose one.** Information on accommodations is available through learning disabilities organizations. The Job Accommodation Network (JAN), a service of the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, has qualified people able to help you find the best accommodation solutions. Be ready with a clear definition of your problem before you call them. (See the *Selected Resources* for more information.)

7. **Consider a productivity or quality argument.** If you do not wish to disclose your disability or prefer to stay away from legal discussions, productivity and quality improvement are good reasons for the employer to meet your disability-related needs. Explain what you want in positive terms. Here are some examples:

   "Have you seen XYZ software? It gets the computer to talk so that you can hear what's on the screen. Because my job requires so much detailed reading, it would be wonderful if I could hear it. Then there would be fewer errors."

   "I need Mary to proof my work before you see it. That way we can both pay more attention to the content and not worry about the way it's typed."

The best accommodations are those that are won without resorting to complaints and lawsuits.

8. **Disclose your disability and request the accommodation verbally.** If you decide to ask for accommodation on the basis of disability, first talk to your supervisor. If you believe your supervisor may not be supportive and you work for a large company, visit your human resources department. If you work within a self-managed work team, your accommodation might be an issue for consideration by the entire team. In that case, talk to the team leader or bring it up at a team meeting.

   Although you do not need to submit medical documentation of your disability at the time you first make your accommodation request, you should have this documentation available to you. Your employer can demand proof of your disability prior to providing an accommodation.

   Have a clear description of your disability, the accommodation(s) needed, and the modifications needed in the work environment to ensure that you meet with success in approaching your job tasks. The Americans with Disabilities Act allows employers to legally turn down accommodation requests if they can prove they constitute "an undue hardship." For this reason, propose the least costly and time-consuming accommodations that will enable you to do your job well.

9. **Follow up with a written request.** Make the request brief; include relevant information about your disability and the need for accommodation. Explain how it will help you meet your employer's goals. Of course, should that fail, the next step is a written complaint under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Following Up

10. **Assess the results of your request.** If you are able to obtain reasonable accommodation, be sure to use it well. Be productive and helpful to your co-workers and your supervisors. Make them glad that they granted the accommodation to you. This will make it easier for the next person seeking accommodations. Thank those who supported you. If the accommodation does not help, restart the process at step 5.

Dale S. Brown won the Ten Outstanding Young Americans Award from the United States Junior Chamber of Commerce for her work on improving employment opportunities for people with learning disabilities. She has written numerous articles and several books on learning disabilities. Her latest book, Employment and Learning Disabilities, *is co-authored with Paul Gerber, Ph.D., and is published by PRO-ED, May 1997.*

Learning Through Accommodations

By Cindy Knight

I went to school when I was four years old, but I had to take kindergarten over because I was too young. I had to take the eighth grade over again because my grades were bad. I was in special classes in school, but I couldn't keep up. The teacher told my mother that I was a slow learner, and my mother thought I was being lazy. The teacher said I tried really hard, but I couldn't understand the work they wanted me to do. I was promoted because I had a good attitude, and I was willing to do any kind of work. I found that I could do things with my hands, and, if they showed me what to do, I could do it with no problem. But, I began to think there was something wrong with me because I couldn't read or write well.

One day, I wanted to write my dad a nice letter, but I couldn't spell. I started writing down words twenty times, but, after a week, I would forget how to spell them. So I stopped trying. One thing I couldn't understand was why I was seeing words or numbers backwards or upside down. I couldn't distinguish a "b" from a "d." I couldn't get a job anywhere because I couldn't read or write. I couldn't even read to my kids.

Then a friend of mine took me to the library and introduced me to Judy who told me about the literacy program. I was placed with a tutor who worked with me one-on-one at my own pace. I took words from the back of my workbooks and made my own dictionary so when I needed a word I knew where to look. Judy got me going in my reading by getting me books that had audiotapes to go along with them. I could even sit down with my kids and listen to these books. I started reading more because I looked up things that I was interested in.

When I'd study the spelling words that my tutor gave me, I would know them for a day or two, but I'd forget them when we'd go on to other words. Judy figured that if I spelled the words in sign language maybe I'd remember them. That helped me keep them in my mind.

My tutor helped me study for my driver's license test. When I was ready, I went to take the oral test but was told that I had to take the written test first. When the officer told me I had passed the written test, I couldn't believe it. I began to feel a little bit of freedom, and my self-esteem started to go up. I realized there were things I could do that I had never dreamed I'd be able to do.

Even though I wanted to go to GED class, I was scared because I thought people would make fun of me. In class, Judy told us that there were different types of people and different ways to teach them. Some of us learned with hands-on experiences, and some of us learned by reading. Some of us had to see it done in front of us, and others had to have it taught by an instructor.

I was very scared to write essays. I'd rather tell my report or do a project than to have to write anything. Once I got on the computer, I found that I could type

> ***I realized there were things I could do that I had never dreamed I'd be able to do.***

and spell my words a whole lot better than if I sat down and wrote. With the computer, I could put the thought down and, then later, put it in the place where I needed it. The computer had spell-check. I even learned *Lotus 1-2-3* and the *Typing Tutor*.

I took the GED Practice Tests orally, after practicing with a tutor reading paragraphs and asking me questions. I took my official GED Tests orally and passed on the first try.

[continued on page 17]

Self-Advocacy in Educational Settings

By Lydia S. Block

Receiving appropriate services and accommodations is a critical part of any educational experience for an individual with learning disabilities (LD). Adults with LD and professionals who instruct them need to address considerations that traditional students in educational settings generally do not need to address.

In order to access services, every individual seeking accommodations must have a **documented** learning disability. Standards for documentation will vary, but every setting requires that a learning disability be identified by a qualified professional. In the case of an adult who has been out of school for a number of years, it is possible that retesting will be required to obtain a current diagnosis.

In an article from ***The PostSecondary LD Report*** (October 1996), Patty Carlton from The Ohio State University states that documentation must include a diagnostic interview, including academic and medical history, and a description of the learning problems. A comprehensive test battery must be administered that measures aptitude and achievement. The resulting report must conclusively state that the individual has a learning disability, include specific suggestions for appropriate accommodations, and describe how these accommodations can be effective.

In the case of a newly diagnosed adult who has never been served in a school setting, the self-reported history becomes a key piece of documentation. Because this history is not based on teacher observation, the individual should gather significant information from parents, school records, siblings, pediatricians, etc. Their observations will be helpful to the diagnostician. It is important to know that documentation will likely be denied if it is incomplete or if it is from other than a qualified professional.

Once the documentation of the disability has been established, it is important to identify the individual or office that serves students with disabilities in the setting that the student is entering. In the case of a community college or technical school, there will be a professional who is designated to work with students with disabilities. These services may be housed in an office whose title may be similar to "The Office for Disability Services," or they may be offered in a learning center setting. In the case of GED and/or literacy classes, services are provided in most cases in the setting in which the course is offered. For example, if a GED course is offered at a community college, the college provides accommodation.

As stated previously, it is important that diagnostic information offer suggestions for accommodation. For example, an individual with a learning disability in reading and written language might benefit from a reader, a scribe or note taker, extended time on exams, or note-taking assistance. These accommodations would be offered to address specific areas of the learning disability.

Mandated services include:

- testing accommodations (reader, scribe, extended time, computer availability);
- books on tape; and
- note-taking assistance.

Services that are helpful to students with learning disabilities but not required by law include tutoring, counseling, learning strategies help, and study skills assistance.

Note-taking assistance can be offered in several different formats. In some school situations, the student takes NCR (carbonless) paper to class and asks another student to take notes. In some settings, there may be a designated note taker or scribe, and, in other cases, the student may be offered a copy of the teacher's notes. To ensure that the student with LD is engaged in the learning process, he or she should take notes as well.

The following tips will help students with learning disabilities negotiate with professionals to get the academic support and accommodations they need:

- Understand your learning disability well enough to describe it.
- Be able to explain how a specific accommodation will help you do your best. For example, if you have an excellent oral vocabulary but have trouble spelling what you say, you may request access to a computer to spell check your written work.
- Explain that an accommodation helps you accomplish the same tasks as your peers. It is not "a break" or an advantage over other students to have extended time on exams. If you write or read more slowly than your peers because of your disability, extra time allows you the time you need to finish.
- If you are working with someone who is reluctant to provide you with what you need, talk to the learning disabilities or special education professional. Ultimately, if you have a diagnosis of a learning disability, you are entitled to accommodations.

Taking classes to improve one's ability to read and to enhance one's life is an important step in reaching one's potential. Having a learning disability is something that affects a student's progress. It is critical that individuals in literacy programs ask for, and receive, the help that they need and to which they are entitled.

Lydia S. Block is an Educational Consultant with Block Educational Consulting in Columbus, Ohio. Dr. Block coordinated special services for college students with learning disabilities at The Ohio State University for 14 years. She currently lectures on the topic of learning disabilities and consults with educational institutions and families. She also publishes ***The PostSecondary LD Report,*** *a newsletter for professionals and LD students that addresses preparation and transition issues.*

Learning Through Accommodations

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Vocational Rehabilitation found a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) class for me, and I worked in a nursing home where I took my clinical tests. I took the final class test for the CNA orally. Then I passed the state test on audiotape and got my CNA license.

I don't know why they didn't find out what was wrong with me when I went to school. It's going to take me a long time to become an LPN, but I know it will be a new experience.

Cindy Knight is thirty-four years old. She lives in Monroe County, West Virginia, with her husband and two sons. She entered a library family literacy program in 1989 and an Adult Basic Education class in 1991.

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Selected Resources

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Hotline
(800) 949-4232

The ADA Hotline provides technical assistance, information services, and outreach regarding the American with Disabilities Act (ADA). This number connects the caller to one of 10 sites based on the caller's location. Hours of operation vary depending on the time zone (Monday - Friday). *Operators are equipped with a listing of LD associations and can answer questions about how ADA protects individuals with LD.* An answering machine is available during non-business hours, and follow-up calls are placed the next working day.

General Educational Development (GED) Testing Service
American Council on Education
One Dupont Circle
Suite 250
Washington, DC 20036-1163
(202) 939-9490
(800) 626-9433

The GED Testing Service (GEDTS) of the American Council on Education administers the GED Tests and provides information on disability-related adaptations/ accommodations for the GED Tests to prospective examinees and instructors. Successful GED test-takers earn a high school equivalency diploma. The tests are available in audio, braille, and large print editions. GEDTS also publishes *GED Items*, a bi-monthly newsletter for examiners and adult education instructors.

HEATH Resource Center
One Dupont Circle
Suite 800
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 939-9320

HEATH Resource Center operates the National Clearinghouse on Postsecondary Education for Individuals With Disabilities. A program of the American Council on Education, HEATH serves as an information exchange for the educational support services, policies, procedures, adaptations, and opportunities of American campuses, vocational-technical schools, adult education programs, and other training entities after high school. The Center collects and disseminates this information so that people with disabilities can develop their full potential through postsecondary education and training.

International Dyslexic Association (IDA)
Chester Building
Suite 382
8600 LaSalle Road
Baltimore, MD 21286-2044
(410) 296-0232
(800) 222-3123

IDA is an international scientific and educational association concerned about dyslexia. Local and state branches serve as literacy resources for dyslexic adults and those who teach or advise them. Many branches offer conferences, seminars, and support groups. IDA's website contains free information: http://interdys.org

Job Accommodation Network (JAN)
West Virginia University
918 Chestnut Ridge Road
Suite 1, Box 6080
Morgantown, WV 26506
(304) 293-7186
(800) 526-7234

JAN is an international information network and consulting resource that provides information about employment issues to employers, rehabilitation professionals, and persons with disabilities. Callers should be prepared to explain their specific problem and job circumstances. Sponsored by the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, the Network is operated by West Virginia University's Rehabilitation Research and Training Center. Brochures and printed materials are available free of charge.

Learning Disabilities Association of America
4156 Library Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15234
(412) 341-1515

LDA (formerly ACLD), a non-profit volunteer advocacy organization, provides information and referral for parents, professionals, and consumers involved with or in search of support groups and networking opportunities through local LDA Youth and Adult Section Chapters. A publications list is available. The Association also prints *LDA Newsbriefs*, a bi-monthly newsletter for parents, professionals, and adults with LD. Available for $13.50/year; to subscribe, contact LDA.

National Center for Learning Disabilities
381 Park Avenue South
Suite 1401
New York, NY 10016
(212) 545-7510
(888) 575-7373

NCLD is an organization committed to improving the lives of those affected by learning disabilities. NCLD provides services and conducts programs nationwide, benefiting children and adults with LD, their families, teachers, and other professionals. NCLD provides the latest information on learning disabilities and local resources to parents, professionals, employers, and others dealing with learning disabilities. NCLD's annual publication is *Their World.*

National Library Services for the Blind and Physically Handicapped
Library of Congress
1291 Taylor St., NW
Washington, DC 20542
(202) 707-5100
(800) 424-8567

National Library Services for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS), a service of the Library of Congress, provides braille and recorded books and magazines on free loan to anyone who cannot read standard print because of visual or physical disabilities.

President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities
1331 F Street, N. W.
Washington, DC 20004-1107
202-376-6200

President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities is an independent federal agency. The committee's mission is to facilitate the communication, coordination, and promotion of public and private efforts to empower Americans with disabilities through employment. The committee offers several publications that address aspects of employment for LD adults including *Pathways to Employment for People with Learning Disabilities* and *Employment Considerations for Learning Disabled Adults.* Both are free.

Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic, Inc. (RFB&D)
The Anne T. Macdonald Center
20 Roszel Road
Princeton, NJ 08540
(609) 452-0606
(800) 221-4792

RFB&D is a national non-profit organization that provides taped educational books on loan, books on diskette, library services, and other educational and professional resources to individuals who cannot read standard print because of a visual, physical, or perceptual disability. There is a registration fee.

The Academy for Educational Development
The Academy for Educational Development, founded in 1961, is an independent, nonprofit service organization committed to addressing human development needs in the United States and throughout the world. Under contracts and grants, the Academy operates programs in collaboration with policy leaders; nongovernmental and community-based organizations; governmental agencies; international multilateral and bilateral funders; and schools, colleges, and universities. In partnership with its clients, the Academy seeks to meet today's social, economic, and environmental challenges through education and human resource development; to apply state-of-the-art education, training, research, technology, management, behavioral analysis, and social marketing techniques to solve problems; and to improve knowledge and skills throughout the world as the most effective means for stimulating growth, reducing poverty, and promoting democratic and humanitarian ideals.

The National ALLD Center
The National ALLD Center, funded by the National Institute for Literacy, promotes awareness about the relationship between adult literacy and learning disabilities. Through its national information exchange network and technical assistance training, the National ALLD Center helps literacy practitioners, policymakers, and researchers better meet the needs of adults with learning disabilities. We encourage your inquiries and will either directly provide you with information or refer you to an appropriate resource. The National ALLD Center is housed under the Institute for Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities within the Academy for Educational Development.

The National Institute for Literacy
The National Institute for Literacy is an independent federal agency jointly administered by the U.S. Departments of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services. The Institute's primary goals are to provide leadership and coordination for literacy activities across federal agencies and among states, enhance the knowledge base for literacy, and create a national communications system that links the literacy field nationwide.

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